THE CITY SQUATTER

Crowbar My Heart #3 • February 2009

Lots of juicy, juicy stuff in this issue including – an interview with Iain McIntyre about squatting & activist history – occupations in the Greek uprisings – SHAC vs Melbourne Uni fight! – Victoria St squats of '73 – sundry personal reflections – young adult literature – pages printed in the correct order (fingers crossed) & more!!

Squatters defy order to leave terraces

A GROUP of squatters was served with an eviction notice by Sydney University yesterday after occupying five houses left vacant for about three years.

Science student Monique Morrison said about 40 people had taken part in the occupation of the houses in Catherine St and Arundel St, Glebe, since Monday.

The protest was part of a campaign to draw attention to the "174,000 houses lying empty in NSW".

The university wrote to the protesters yesterday, asking them to leave by 1pm.

But last night, a spokeswoman for Glebe police said they were waiting for instructions from university authorities before taking action.

The protesters — including students and unemployed people — remained defiant, taunting a passing police car with chants of "come and get us".

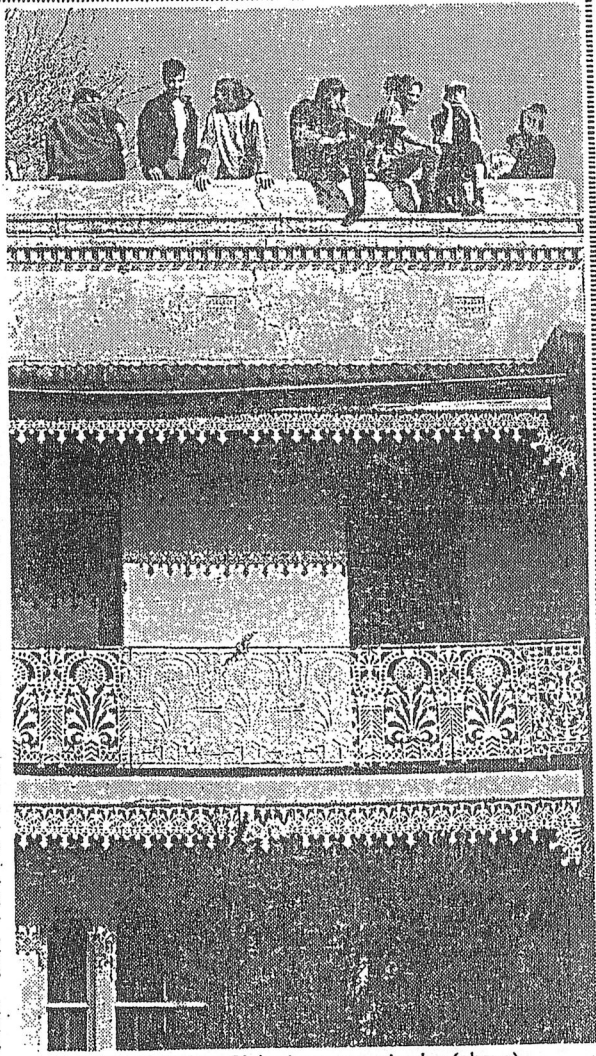
Ms Morrison said they would stay until they were "forced out by the law".

"If they do evict us — are they (the houses) going to lie empty for another five years or another 10 years?" she said.

Glebe resident John Harrison expressed support for the protesters' cause, if not the "type of people" involved.

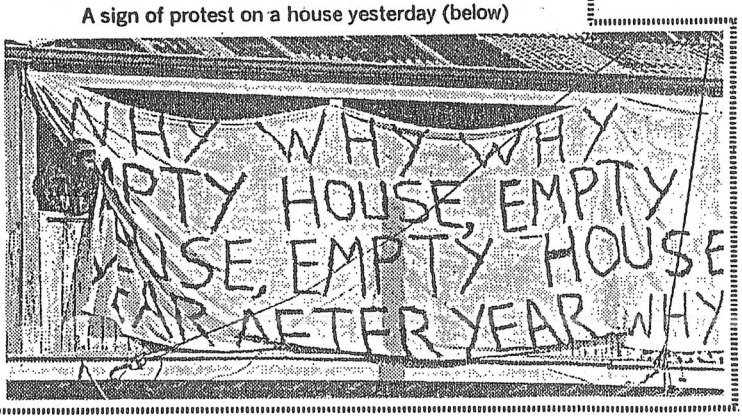
"Regardless of their clothing and hairstyles, it is wrong for the houses to be left empty," he said.

Nick Cocks, who lives in Catherine St, said the protesters "seem to have cleaned the place up a bit".



Students in a Glebe terrace yesterday (above)

A sign of protest on a house yesterday (below)



TELEGRAPH MIRROR 26/6/93

The glamorous life of a squatter.

Last Friday night I was laying on the couch watching *The Sopranos* when a bunch of people walked by our house, a pretty rundown-looking place that belongs to the council. It really stands out as a badly maintained mess in our fairly well-off street. These people were coming back from somewhere, dinner or drinks, they were pretty buzzed. In between slapping at mosquitos, I overheard this dude say something like, "yeah, the council… fucking squatters, it's a disgrace." I was ready to jump up and run outside and confront this dude, but then I realised that, first of all, I didn't have any pants on. Hey, it was really hot. And then, I wasn't totally sure what he'd said. It would have sucked to get out there all, "Yo motherfucker, you got something to say about squatters?" And he goes, "Squatters? I said I don't like Harry Potter. And um, you know you got no pants on, right?"

Anyway, then I realised I didn't know how many dudes were out there. It would suck to get beat down by a gang of drunk Rozelle anti-squatter bigots. What kind of squat zine editor would I be, then? Shown up by the home-owners. Anyway, the point of this story is DON'T EVER SQUAT. It starts off fine, then suddenly one day you're 30 years old, single, bitter, drinking beer alone, sitting around in your underwear watching TV on a Friday night, nursing fantasies of violence against random strangers you might have overheard badmouthing your lifestyle.

I'm kidding, of course. You should go squat right now! Why not?! I will lend you a crowbar and everything. If you've never experienced it, let me tell you, not paying rent is fun. Ah, the heady frisson of semilegal living arrangements. It's weird, I mostly never tell people that I'm squatting because it seems boastful or something, but then

when I do, the most common reaction now - very different from even 18 months ago - is, "Yeah, well, we'll probably all be squatting soon," chortle chortle, digression on Sydney rental market, insanity thereof. And I chortle along but inside I just feel like, "Well, come on." Rent's not getting any cheaper. You see that empty house every day, you know how easy it would be to pop that window after dark, change the locks, throw up some stencils on the walls cause you don't have any bond to get back. Then we can all form a roving vigilante gang and be all up in drunk yuppie dudes' faces. "You got a problem with squatters, you got a problem with squatters, huh? HOW BOUT WE KICK THE FUCKING DOGSHIT OUT OF YOU, FUCKFACE?!?!" Holy shit, this is the dumbest intro to any zine I ever wrote. I'm blaming the heat.

I was going to say this was the last issue of this here zine, but then the other day I was at this punk show and two dudes I didn't know introduced themselves, said they'd read the zine and it had made them consider squatting for the first time. And frankly, if the zine can pay off in that kind of ego-strokage, I will probably keep doing it. Just don't forget, it's not about me, it's about you - people who squat, used to squat, think about squatting, went to a party in a squat one time, had an aunt who squatted in Glebe way back when, you know, whatever. Send something in, doesn't matter how polished or half-arsed, drawings or photos, flyers for old squat gigs, stories, articles, questions, notes scrawled on beer coasters. Cause for real, right now I wish I knew more about what it was like to squat in the 70s, 80s, etc, and if in 20 years this zine can read to some random future weirdo who comes across a rotting copy in a zine library the way *City Squatter* reads to me now, I would be stoked. Hi, random future weirdo, hope we didn't destroy the planet too bad. Oh, we did? Sorry.

Thanks! to contributors Liam, Stef, Princess Mob, and K. F. Asseraf. Thanks to *Mutiny* and especially Princess Mob for arranging for me to reprint KF's article about SHAC. Special thanks to Iain McIntyre for the interview and for awesome archival material. Black Rose Library also helped a lot with this issue, and Sticky's zine festival was a good motivator to get it done. As always, thanks to my housemates, Lara and Poss. I am putting this issue together on a friend's couch in Melbourne and I have embarrassingly FORGOTTEN at least one submission that was given to me hardcopy-like, still in my bedroom, sorry, I packed in a hurry. Next issue, I promise; sorry, Fez. Keep your eyes open for Housing Action, making it big in 09. Squatfest is coming up soon, too. If you'd like to contribute to the next issue, please do!

Cheers,
Sandy.

Contact: comradecrowbar@yahoo.com.au

Thanks also to Esther for lending me scissors & gluestick, etc, so I could finish this issue while I was in Melbourne, & to Raf for lending me his dictaphone.
Front cover picture shows a squatter, possibly Elvis Kipman (?), making a stand on the roof of either 114 or 115 Victoria St, January 1974.

Strategies and decisions in the SHAC campaign
K. F. Asseraf

On August 19, and after months of planning, SHAC moved into Melbourne University owned buildings which had been empty for over three years. We informed the media immediately and offered the University a chance to appropriate us, to take on our proposal for the site - a pilot housing co-operative - and make it theirs. Our strategy was to play one institution against another. We relied upon the anxiety of an institution trying to generate a 'positive public image' by managing the way in which it was portrayed in the 'news'. Another strategy, running alongside this, was to involve the local community: people living in Carlton, local students, international students. Banners, letter drops, public events, dinners, forums, tours, meeting spaces. The previously empty buildings immediately began to function as both a home and a community centre; many of our visitors became participants in the campaign, and radicalised by the direct action we had taken.

Our combination of direct action, media games, a 'responsible' approach to fire safety and conciliatory negotiation was an important factor in the longevity of our occupation of the buildings and the successes of the campaign. But this combination of strategies was also a site of tension as the campaign proceeded. On the one hand, we were, and still are (we are not done!), calling for institutional and regulatory reforms. We made an intervention into the housing crisis effecting both local and international students in Melbourne, and tried to generate solidarity in this (particularly international students, whose exploitation is so often rendered invisible, despite its

staggering magnitude). In short, we used every medium available to us call for a radical re-organisation of the ways in which housing is institutionally regulated.

On the other hand, there was a sense at certain points in the campaign that the autonomous, anti-hierarchical and decentralised mode of organisation which our co-operative strived towards would be lost once appropriated by university, city councils, government etc (you know, 'responsible people'). The campaign was always going to extend beyond us, but we had to work to ensure that our values would not be effaced as our project was taken up (and this risky appropriation is, ultimately, what we were fighting for in negotiations).

I want to map out something of this tension, to outline the problems that we encountered (at least, as I understand it). It played out for us around the refrain of 'diversity of tactics.' Though it was this 'diversity' which was so powerful, I feel that this language can also be a dangerous one.

We cannot include everything, thats the way of time and space. Invoking 'diversity of tactics' can hide the fact that certain courses of action exclude other courses of action. It can hide this reality of decision making (inclusion-exclusion), especially when we work with consensus. Lets not kid ourselves, there is always all kinds of violence when we come together and organise. If we efface this, and keep saying 'diversity of tactics' to one another, cracks in trust can show, support can disappear, collective members can become alienated from the campaign, good collective practice can be forgotten (ironically, in the name of good collective practice).

Strategies, tensions

First, we said, screamed, wrote, submitted: 'co-operatives, autonomy!'. We argued (legitimately, and with the voice that our illegitimate position gave us) for a change in institutional regulation and funding; for a change that would facilitate (relatively) autonomous living for students (collective responsibility, collective management, anti-hierarchical organisation). And we built a campaign with broad support and solidarity from unions, students, various organisations and local residents. We hoped, and still do hope, that this would allow a radical change in the ways in which we live and organise. But this was not just for us, and not only for students. The project was ambitious: work alongside Union Solidarity in order to catalyse a massive change in the organisation of housing in Melbourne (in all our hilarious submissions and documents we started saying 'affordability' and 'accessibility' alongside 'co-operative living').

So we negotiated. We started using stupid phrases like 'good faith', we wrote letters, made contacts with academics and politicians, we even organised a debate for the Melbourne City council elections.

As early as September the University Council received a submission by SHAC and directed the Executive (the Vice-Chancellor, the Provost: the managers) to investigate the feasibility of student-run cooperatives like SHAC as a solution to the housing crisis. Despite SHAC's attempts to feed into this investigation, and despite a second and more concrete submission to the next council meeting, the Executive made it clear that they would not speak to us.

But then, after months of not negotiating with us, the uni imposed a stupid and aggressive strategic urgency upon the situation. They continued to impose impossible and coercive deadlines for 'correspondence', and, when we complied, they responded with extremely slow responses. In collaboration with Melbourne City council, they continued to sabotage negotiations (at one point, we proposed a date for concluding negotiations and 'voluntary vacation' – and they rejected our offer, sticking to their impossible deadline and massing security guards at the front of the building). So negotiations unsurprisingly fell apart.

(Admittedly, there were key negotiators in the Uni who were approaching the SHAC issue with 'good intentions' and all kinds of 'good faith'. But intentions, like faith, are peripheral, multi-layered and complex. 'Good intentions' do not automatically translate into good outcomes. And who judges what is good in these circumstances? Good for who? And for what? There was certainly no clear consensus in the collective.

If there was both 'good faith' and 'bad faith', the issue becomes what we are placing ourselves against – the institutions, how they function, what they facilitate, what they cannot do. It doesn't matter whether the University's actions were 'caused' by incompetence or maliciousness, faith or intentions. The important thing to emphasise is the way the actions of the university functioned in the situation. In this sense, it's not about the intentions of individuals, it's about the necessary political actions of the institution and the realities to which individuals within these institutions are subject. And when we act, together, we can only act within this situation).

In this context, the tension between our strategies became more of a strain. There was a mood in the collective that we could not trust the university at all. Negotiation ceased to be a priority for the collective and a number of other goals and justifications came to predominate: squat, and inspire others to take direct action to meet their needs. Defend the site with barricades and media, and inspire others to defend their projects. This was also a positive opportunity to change the way in which squatting is perceived. Another thought that floated around: if they are going to fuck us, then lets fuck them. The eviction will hurt them, we might as well make them bleed: publicly - they are petrified of bad PR and the Secretary of the Trades Hall Council made some scary threats about industrial action (which turned out to be empty threats, but the Uni took them seriously). Obviously, these latter approaches involve a refusal to be appropriated in any way by institutions such as Melbourne uni. They are less optimistic, more realistic about these institutions...or they are more romantic and possibly more self-righteous.

A further possible course of action presented itself once negotiations had broken down. In this case there would be a gesture towards the legal institution and away from the university. Melbourne Uni took us to the supreme court because the cops said they wouldn't boot us without a court order (interestingly, and this is something to keep in mind for future direct action housing projects, the cops thought we were "tenants", not "squatters" because the Uni had allowed us to stay for so long without booting us).

So the question presented itself: Was it worth contesting the Uni in the Supreme Court?

Involving the courts, in addition to the university and the media, offered further opportunities for playing institutions against one another. However the collective at that time made a decision not to fight in the courts, primarily because certain members of the collective would have had to name themselves as defendants and, possibly, made to pay a whole lot of money to the university. There was also a feeling that fighting such a battle would detract from the 'community building' element of the campaign. Others, who were not active at the time felt that a legal battle was important, that it could potentially set up a precedent in which squatting might gain some legal status as in Europe.

Decisions

Decisions with respect to each of these pathways were made at different stages of the campaign; they were made on the basis of the power relations that were at play at any one time in the group of people that were involved. This was complicated by the fact that the make-up of the group continued to shift considerably. This made consistency in decision making difficult; it is hard to avoid the conclusion that collective action and consensus are best practiced when decision makers are consistent, not always changing. Although it is essential that we always include new people, a campaign will always suffer if those who have been around since the beginning are no longer able to be involved and share their knowledge.

In general, nothing can be decided about the right approach beforehand. Working out the best course of action is always a matter

of context, and of not knowing in advance the outcomes of our actions. This is why being honest about our politics means being aware that there can be no evangelical certainty as to the best direction, action or outcome. We are just trying to work together, which means respecting one another, acting with trust and solidarity. But these are not simple, they wouldn't be necessary if they were (we were not always solid in this regard, often exhausted, we were rather too simple, especially when the tensions became a strain). They are only possible and necessary because there is tension and risk in everything we do.

SHAC was intense. It was high profile. It was hard. We were trying to do something that has never been achieved in Australia: legitimise a squatted social center. We were doing this in a social context where there was previously hardly any 'mainstream' support for squatting. This is not Greece where students control University owned properties. This is not Holland where squatters legally control buildings that have been left vacant for just 18 months. In this context, we did a brilliant job. But the scope of the project meant that it was fraught with difficulty.

Having said that, people all over the country should do what we did. We would support anyone who took the steps we took in order to bring about reforms to housing policy, put a roof over their heads, and draw attention to the need for more affordable housing.

If you want to read more about SHAC, and hear voices other than this one, take a look at our blog: http://shacmelbourne.blogspot.com/

Personal reflections of a squatter

My life, it doesn't add up. Nothing connects to anything else. I'm not the sum of my parts. All my parts don't add up to one...me.

Before the Devil Knows You're Dead (2007)

Curious

Last year I lived with a police officer. I started asking him roundabout questions relating to squatting. As always he was friendly, generous and helpful. *Why do you ask?* he says with a wide grin on his face. *Just curious*, I reply my grin matching his, then, *what would you do if you discovered squatters?* He replies, *I would go and speak to them and hear their side of the story.* I try to picture this. He sounds so reasonable. I wonder what this lovely guy I live with is like on the beat.

First time

I go dumpstering for the first time and experience a real thrill. It's not just that the food is free, but I feel like more of a hunter-gatherer than fighting the Coles crowds on a Saturday morning. I am so proud of what we glean. *Look at these bananas! They didn't even start to go brown until days after we dumpstered them!* I can't help exclaiming to anyone who will listen.

I take a date to Mckell Park on a sunny Sunday afternoon. We sit amongst the Eastern Suburbs crowd and I feed him deli-bought olives and cured meats and bakery-bought baguette and dumpstered cheese.

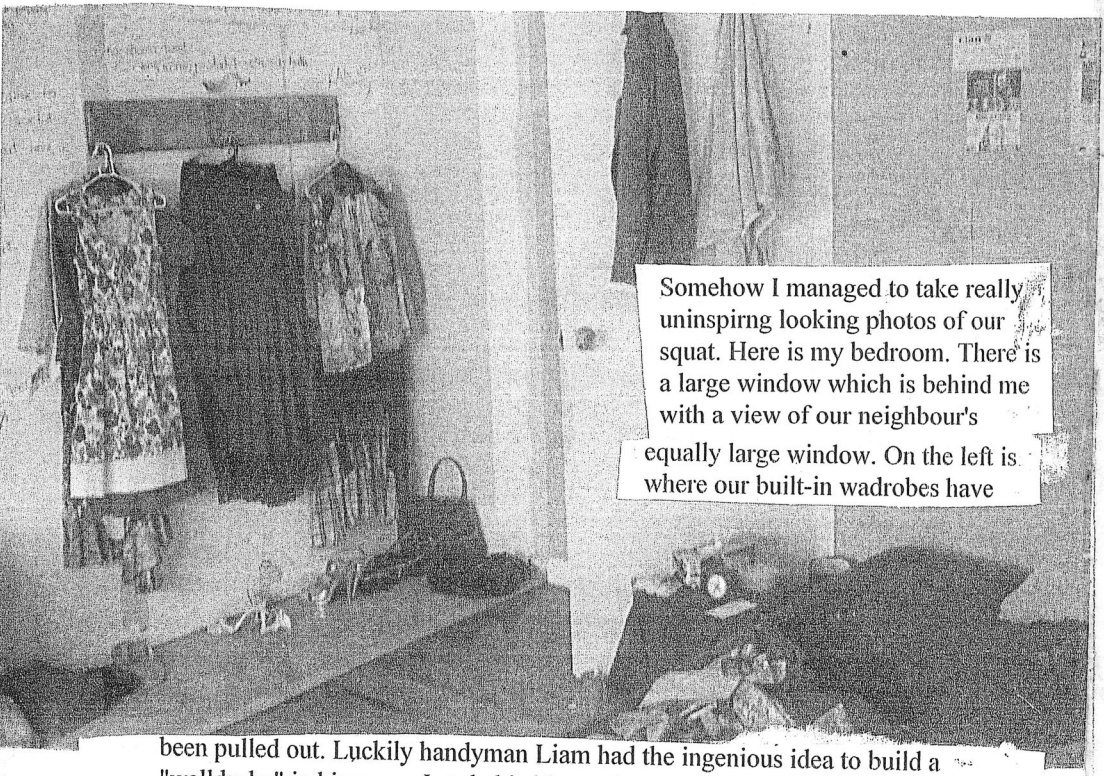
Working for Murdoch

Every day I go to work in a sky-high air-conditioned office with views of the city and harbour and a nice kitchen and even nicer toilets. I work with other young university students and recent graduates who are all cool and fashionable. One particularly beautiful girl, tall with blonde hair, lives in Bondi and has a second job at the Ivy. I like going to the Ivy and sipping expensive cocktails. But I also like getting my groceries from a bin. I can't figure out how such different things can all be part of me.

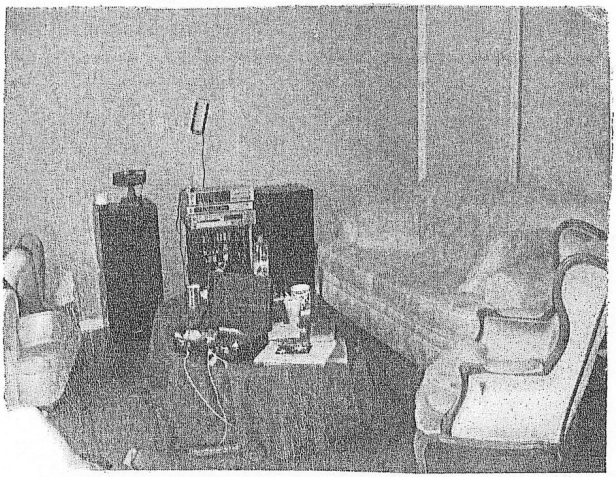
I start to look for this disconnectedness in other people. The softly spoken guy from my work one day starts talking about his punk friends and run-ins with the law. It is then that I notice his eyebrow ring for the first time. Previously I had only noticed his office attire and his gentle smile. I want to tell him that I'm squatting and invite him over but I can't bring myself to do it. It seems too out of place in this air-conditioned office.

Sitting at my desk one day I notice dark grime smeared down the side of my arm. I'm not sure how it got there but I figure it was whilst I was doing some house work at my squat, or on one of my nightly walks in search of junk to put in the squat. And I love that grime and look at it throughout the day and it makes me smile. There is one piece of the squatter me connected to the worker me. I start to think that maybe someone will notice and understand what it means, they will come up to me and quietly say *I also squat*. But no one says anything, they probably just feel embarrassed for me walking around the office looking so dirty.

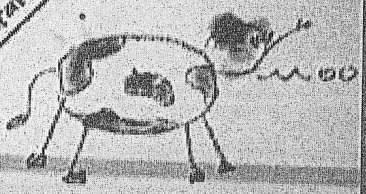
STEF



Somehow I managed to take really uninspirng looking photos of our squat. Here is my bedroom. There is a large window which is behind me with a view of our neighbour's equally large window. On the left is where our built-in wadrobes have been pulled out. Luckily handyman Liam had the ingenious idea to build a "walldrobe" in his room. I stole his idea and pretended to help whilst he built one for me too. Thanks Liam. All around my walldrobe I decided to document my story from when I first had the idea of squatting right up to today. Here are some extracts from my wall complete with illustrations.



Liam & Dom.
I eat steak sandwiches
after learn Liam is
a Vegetarian



terraces then...

153 BALMAIN RD

It was love at
first sight

no shower head.
every morning started with a

Day 1: met neighbours. "boring day is a day
day to move"
they observe

Day 2: first shopping list:
first item "alcohol" then I am
slicing tomatoes with a butter knife

Day 3: HUNG OVER
spend the day in a state between waking &
PARANOIA
every sound is the owner knocking
& every plane is a bomb crashing into my bed

Iain McIntyre Interview.

I met Iain while he was in Sydney to play w/ his band, 99, & launch his two recent publications - Always Look On The Bright Side, about the 90s anti-AIDEX arms fair protests, & Lock Out The Landlords, about eviction resistance during the Depression. Both highly reccomended by the staff here at Crowbar. I was keen to talk to him about anti-eviction action & activist history, but while we were looking for somewhere to eat & talk, he mentioned an old squat of his, so we settled in at Bar Italia & started with that.

Do you want to talk a bit about the squat in Richmond, since you just mentioned that?

Oh. (Laughs) Sure. I'll give you a potted history of the squats I've lived in.

Yeah, do that.

Well, when I first moved to Melbourne in 92, myself and my friend Laura went to a public meeting about squatting. We'd already been active in Perth's scene, radical scene, whatever, very small radical scene. So we knew about squatting, but didn't really know anyone who'd been doing it in Perth. We went to this public meeting and met some people who were involved with a thing called Squatters' Information Service, which became Squatters' Information Network because the acronym's cooler. It was kind of the leftovers - not the leftovers exactly, but it was people that had been in the Melbourne Squatters' Union in the 80s, and didn't really have the energy to run a union-type thing any more, but Shelter Victoria, who later got defunded under Kennett, had an office, and they would turn it over to the squatters on a Friday afternoon. We ran an information line out of there, and eventually produced a squatters' handbook.

So we went along to a meeting that was to do with that, met some people, ended up moving into a place in Brunswick which was next door to another squat. About half the house was pretty much destroyed, because obviously a pipe had burst at some point and rotted about half the house away. Moved in there and lived there for a few months, and then kind of made the classic mistake of letting some sketchy semi-friends come and stay, on the proviso they'd just stay for a little while, 'cause we only had really a room and a half.

(My bocconcini salad arrives - don't order this, it's pretty bland.)

We only really had a room and a half, so there wasn't really room for four more people. At that time, there were a lot of empties in Melbourne. It seemed like, in the inner city, there was one on about every street. There might not have been that many, but it certainly wasn't hard to find another one. So we offered to help them find another one, and they refused to leave, and we had to move out. Yeah, anyway, just a word of warning, you can kind of get taken over. We moved out, and unfortunately the people that moved in fucked up things for the other squatters next door, because the owner - I hope you're going to summarise all this. The owner had never come round, but one day we got up and there was a 'For Sale' sign out the front from the real estate, who were directly across the road. We went over to them and sort of said, "Ah, we're living in those houses, what's going on?" It turned out the owner was a funeral parlour called Ginarelli's, who were rumoured to be involved in organised crime. Certainly they got named in some royal commission for stealing people's gold teeth or something, I can't remember. They were a bit sketchy, but they'd previously let other squatters in Melbourne stay in some of their properties. Eventually the man from Ginarelli's came around and he said, "You can stay as long as you don't fuck the house up." Unfortunately, the sketchy types who moved in, about a month after we moved out pulled down the fence for firewood and everyone got evicted. Anyway, so that was the first squat I had.

Then went through a lot of squats, 'cause as I say, there were quite a few empties at the time, but I guess in the early to mid 90s in Melbourne, it was probably similar here in Sydney, it was pretty much a matter of, you'd squat somewhere, get thrown out after a day or a week or a few weeks, you'd squat something else, and you'd just keep going until hopefully something stuck. In some ways - well, you can't really do that anymore, unless maybe you live in Newcastle. But I suppose these days when you do find an empty, it's usually probably empty for a reason. Like a deceased estate, or there's something going on. So unless it's a place that's about to be renovated, yeah, when you do find a place it might be better anyway.

So yeah, we must have spent about three months getting thrown out of one place after another, and packed it in for a while. Then, a few years later, we moved into a place in Carlton where some friends had been given a key, and it was a bankrupt place. The company had gone bankrupt and they owed money overseas, so yeah, we had this big office. At various times, probably up to nine people lived there. It was a very mixed household, from ages about 22 to 60. And yeah, one artist guy moved in at some point, a friend of a friend, and I think he never spoke to anyone, he was really shy. It was kind of a funny set-up. But anyway, we were in there for over a year and eventually got thrown out when they sold the place.

After that we came up with the idea, and maybe somebody out there can crack it, that people get made bankrupt all the time, and there are big bureaucracies that deal with the properties. So... I don't think there's any way to get a hold of a list, without having somebody who's on the inside, but at various times... We tried one thing for a while where we looked in the bankruptcy listings in the papers every day, and there was a computer in a law court - you could probably do it online now - to see what the result of the bankruptcy case was. Unfortunately what we found was in about 99% of cases, people never got made bankrupt, it was just to scare them into finally coughing up. But I'm sure there's a lead in there.

So yeah, I lived there. In between all those times I went and lived in the UK, and lived on a squatted road protest, the M11, in 1994.

(Iain's vegie lasagne comes, it looks to be a lot better than my salad. Why did I go to Bar Italia and order *salad*?)

Yeah, lived there for about five or six months, and then got involved with the 121, which is a long-time squatted social centre in London. I guess I've probably gone back and forth to the UK four or five times. I've always squatted there, because the laws... They've got a similar problem there to here now, in terms of a lot fewer empties than there used to be because of the boom, although maybe that's going to change. But yeah, generally, the law's a lot better. In the 90s the councils - well, from the 70s, the councils in the UK... in Britain, the councils provide social housing. So in Brixton, due to corruption and ineptitute, there were a lot of houses sitting around, empty. So you would squat them and usually it would take a year or

so for the council to get onto it, and then another three months to go through court, before you get evicted. That was pretty good.

These days, because the councils did what we around the 121 and other squatters were always saying. Basically, "They're sitting on all these places, one day they're going to flog them all off and invest it in whatever mad project they're into at the time." In Brixton, that's what happened. Through the late 90s, mid to late 90s, they sold off in excess of 100 properties, then basically gave very low interest loans to anyone who was wanting to invest, open a wine bar or nice bookshop or something in Brixton. That's what happened, the area gentrified very rapidly. Because when I was there in 97, the council was trying on this thing called The Brixton Challenge, and we had this campaign called Sink The Brixton Challenge. This was around the time they were starting to flog off properties. The challenge was to turn Brixton into a yuppy place because, yeah, it's the perfect location in terms of, you can live there and commute to the city to work in a financial institution in ten minutes. There was already a lot of artists there, and it's got that afro-carribean thing. But the problem for them was, every ten years or so there'd be a riot. I think in 96 or 97 - I might be getting my years mixed up here - there was another riot, and that sank Brixton Challenge.

But then later, New Labor got in, and by 1999, they were pretty solidly… yeah, the area was changing. So it is easier to squat there than here, but not as many empties in the areas people want to live. I think out in West London there's heaps, but no-one really wants to live out there.

Other than that, I came back to Australia and squatted in Richmond for about a year. A friend had this weird little house that was… the original house had burnt down and the old fella that was living there had got a granny flat. It was kind of like this little one-bedroom flat on stilts in the middle of this huge block that was all really overgrown, in Richmond, near… I think it's Victoria Gardens. While I was there, they were building a massive shopping mall, so it was quite weird, 'cause during the day it would be really noisy with heaps of cranes and giant machines, and then at night it was silent 'cause half the street had already been bought up, no-one was really living there. It was quite spooky. So yeah, I was there about a year, and then my friends, they had the place for maybe five years,

they came back and took over. That was a deceased estate-type scenario. So yeah, My Squatting Experiences.

All right, so I mostly wanted to ask you about *Lock Up The Landlords*. Do you want to talk a bit about where the idea came from, or how you got started on the project?

Yeah, there were a few things. I read a few different books about the Great Depression, I guess, which referred to these Anti Eviction Committees and the work that mainly the Unemployed Workers Movement did in rejecting and stopping evictions during the Great Depression. Then there was a tape - his name's gone out of my head, but there was a transcript or some of the interview in *Disturbing The Peace*, if you've seen that book. He was an old pommy guy, and he came and talked to some anarchists about unemployed resistance in the 30s, and he had quite interesting stories about the anti-eviction stuff. I decided to dig a little deeper.

I was housesitting in Sydney, and I discovered that in the Workers Weekly, which was the Communist Party paper, had a story nearly every week about another eviction resistance, particularly in the early 30s. That was when the Communist Party was pushing it. They moderated their line later. Even though eviction resistance went on, they didn't report on it so much.

Between that and some other sources, I put the original pamphlet together in 97. Fiona Taylor did some printing, and some other people, and we did it as a benefit for Barricade [Books]. Then yeah, it wasn't available anymore and a few people were asking about it, and earlier in the year a friend was over from England and he found a risograph on eBay for $100, so he bought this risograph. We thought, "Oh, we've got the risograph, better do something with it." I'd found some more references and a thesis and stuff, and decided I could add a bit to the old pamphlet. So that's it.

How were you tracking down those sorts of sources, like theses and...

Oh, I've got a pretty general interest in radical history, so I just read a lot. Yeah, I was reading something about Footscray and there were a couple of stories in there. I can't remember, just came across references in things and followed them up.

Have you always been interested in radical history, or where did that interest spring from?

Well, I'm going to talk about it a little bit later [at the book launch]. I think I've always been interested in history, to a degree. Even as a teenager I used to be interested in stuff. But I suppose in terms of Australia particularly, part of it's just a nerd thing, I just enjoy it. And part of it's also, I think it's good to know where you're coming from, to work out where to go. And hopefully get some insight into what works at different times.

I suppose with the Australian stuff, it kind of came about because I got involved in the anarchist scene in the late 80s, and everyone knew more about Spain or Russia than they knew about here. I guess at the time, a lot of people I knew were always complaining that we weren't in some revolutionary-type state, which apparently Berlin was or something, which certainly had a much bigger radical scene, but I think some of the people were a bit carried away with what they could expect in other countries. They'd taken the hyperbole of radical propaganda a bit too seriously.

But anyway, I knew lots of people who'd done a lot of pranks and stuff in Perth, and a lot of interesting, creative political interventions, and I thought it would be good to put something together that told people about those - partly because they were just interesting stories, but to give them some ideas, and also to show them that you didn't have to have heaps of people, you didn't have to have this massive movement to do something and hopefully have some sort of effect. That fed into putting together the *How To Make Trouble* books. I guess once I started digging into all that and chatting with people, that's probably really where it blossomed from there.

With deciding to republish *Lock up the Landlords*, you said that was partly because you had the risograph, but did it also have to do with the context now? Like, what's the relevance of reprinting that today?

Look, I think it's inspiring. Obviously we live in an almost completely different universe to people of the 1920s and 30s. We're not living in these more condensed neighbourhoods where everyone knows each other. There's good sides to that. When you talk to grandparents and parents, they talk about when there was more of that community it could be repressive, in a way, everybody sort of knowing your business and looking down on the lady on the corner who was divorced, or whatever. But the up side was people had some community and would help each other out as well.

The timing wasn't particularly to do with the rental crisis, really. Yeah, I don't have a really good answer to that. (Laughs) I guess it seemed like it wasn't available anymore, and people wanted to know about it, and it does seem to have struck a bit of a chord. I've had a few places that have been stocking it saying heaps of people have been wanting to read it, because they all hate their landlords. I guess it could give people some ideas, but I think a lot of the context's so different... Maybe more inspiration than anything.

So if people are interested in doing their own sort of activisty histories or radical histories and stuff, do you have any tips or advice for people interested in pursuing it?

Sure. I know Loophole in Melbourne - I was just having a conversation with one of the people that does the library there, and they're really interested in, I suppose, getting the word out that they've got lots of magazines and zines that people have done about things that don't seem that long ago, but haven't actually been documented - like Baxter and Jabiluka and other protests. They're building up a resource there, and I think that's a really good place to start. I think Barricade's library is getting moved in there [to their new premises] at some point, and that's got a lot of great stuff. Jura's library's getting sorted out at some point.

So probably a good thing if you're interested in radical history is to go to some of these anarchist libraries. The one at Black Rose seems pretty good, too. You'll find zines and stuff that people produced about that stuff. For instance, with squatting stuff, a few of the different anarchist libraries have the old *Squatter*, which was a pamphlet that was produced. Then I guess the next step, really, is just to find people that were involved and chat with them. Thanks to the internet, that's become a hell of a lot easier, to track people down. Sometimes it's hard if you don't have a name or whatever to start with, but you've just got to find a crusty old troublemaker and start with them.

OK, I wanted to ask you about something you wrote in the introduction to the AIDEX book. You were talking about the cycles of activism sort of waxing and waning, and in the down cycle, "the numbers drift away and the hardcore sit around despairing, or, if they're farsighted enough, preparing for the next upswing." So, I guess it's fair to say we're in that down phase at the moment...

Yeah! (Laughs)

So I was wondering what reflections you had on what would be a good way to start preparing for the next upswing, what people can do in terms of that cycle?

Yeah, I'm not any... I probably don't have a lot of great suggestions or answers. It's something everybody's got to come to themselves. I think it's fair to say a lot of the campaigns and stuff I've been involved in have been a bit half-arsed or sort of made some noise at the time and then faded away. I think that's something that I'm still looking for myself, campaigns and a style of politics that combines a radical vision in the longer term with an actual, practical, being-able-to-do-things-now. Because it's a very age-old dilemma that you tend to fall into either just responding to what's going on now or getting hooked up in sort of reformist, for want of a better term, activities - or defensive, really, mainly. It's been a while since the left's been on the front foot. Or you get involved in this politicising about great ideas, which have some relevance but aren't necessarily going to make great change now. That's a tension.

I suppose for me, a lot of what the left has to do is rebuild our credibility. I think fewer and fewer people have that connection to, it's a bit amorphous, but leftist ideas around equality and so forth. There's still some of that around. Obviously something like Get Up, which doesn't require very much effort, can mobilise a lot of people to click a few buttons. It isn't a lot, but it shows that there are people out there that are willing to click those buttons. (Laughs) So people are interested.

But I just get the sense that a lot of people growing up now and coming up now have got nothing to do with unions. And unions are pretty crap for the most part, but it's at least a link to some sort of solidarity or whatever. Society's becoming more and more individualised, and so it's not… I don't know. It's not necessarily enough just to call out on the basis of leftist stuff. In a way, you have to show people that our ideas have some credibility and our methods work. I don't think most people have any experience of them working. Most young people have never been on strike or never been to a demonstration or never been part of a campaign. That, to a degree, has always been the case, but… you know, I'm waffling a bit 'cause I'm trying to nail this, but that percentage of the population has only gotten smaller. So in a way, I think it's important for us to re-establish credibility, and I guess a lot of the way to do that is just to get involved in local issues, really basic issues, and hopefully build up from there. But I don't really have a magic formula.

It was interesting, this year, I haven't been involved in a campaign for a while, I put pretty much most of my effort into writing and doing stuff around 3CR [community radio station] in Melbourne, because I got frustrated with a lot of these projects I got involved with not really, in a way, having any ongoing effect. One great thing about 3CR is that it is an institution, and if you raise money for it and put effort into it, you know it's going to be there in five or ten years. This year was the first time, other than in a turning-up-to-demos way, I really got involved with a campaign. Mainly it was just with fundraising for this anti-arms fair one. I'd sort of said, "I don't want to get involved with another campaign unless it's a winner this time." But I got involved because I was working on the AIDEX book, and I knew a lot of the people, and it was a bit of a grudge match for all of us. "We can't let them do it, that was our one victory," you know. It'd be like they were going to re-open Jabiluka or something for people five years younger.

Yeah, so it was great that we won. I thought it was going to be one where we'd just get pushed around and go home going, "Yeah, we just got mashed again." So yeah, it's not like we can't win. (Both laugh)

"It's not like we can't win." That's probably a good way to finish off. But I was interested, you mentioned when you moved to Melbourne, you got involved with the Squatters' Info Network, what was your impression of the sort of squatting scene in Melbourne at that time?

Yeah, it was still kind of happening. There was a whole bunch of houses in a street in Fitzroy called Ray Street, five or six in a row. I think it was owned by the Public Transport Commission. They knocked all the fences down. So that was happening. I think that's often what triggers… maybe it's an example of what I was trying to talk about before, but establishing something that people can connect into. This is very vague, stuff I'm working through myself, constantly. What they hell are we doing and why are we doing it?

But yeah, it wasn't like an officially open squat, but because there was this big place that people knew about, other people could go, "Oh wow, they're doing it, maybe I can do it." Certainly later on, when there was the Brown Warehouse squat in Melbourne in the mid 90s, that triggered a whole lot of other people squatting too, because it was like, "Oh, there's this big place." I think probably Broadway did that here a bit, too.

Well, I lived in Melbourne then.

Yeah, right. I got the sense that was something that was good. Having these big places, you can check them out and know that things can be done, it inspires other people. I also think the Squatters Line was another example of doing practical solidarity work with people.

People would call up looking for empties, or…

Yeah. We just had a list of empties. People were meant to ring back and tell us if it'd been knocked down or squatted or whatever, and nobody ever did, so some of those listings were probably a little old. But yeah, we had a list, and people could ring up, and we just gave them advice. I don't think we ever really did much… I was there on the tail end of it, but I think there was also the idea there that we might do some other solidarity stuff, which we didn't really. But Squatters' Union had done more of that in the 80s, occasionally having a big, public anti-eviction thing. I think, yeah, having that line was good 'cause people got to know it.

We still, out of the Squatters' Union and the Unemployed Workers Union in the 80s, came some shows on 3CR which eventually moulded together to become the SUUWA show [Squatters Union and Unwaged Workers Airwaves]. I just finished doing that this year. But SUUWA still gets call from people looking for advice and stuff who knew about this old advice line. So I think that was a good way, by having that advice line, of not just helping people out and getting the word out, but also providing some practical solidarity where you could see the ideas actually work. People might not run with them, but at least they got some experience of it.

Here are contact details for the radical libraries Iain mentioned: Loophole is at 843a High St, Thornbury, VIC, and the phone number is 9484 8012. Barricade is 62 St Georges Rd, Northcote, VIC, I dunno their number. Jura is 440 Parramatta Rd, Petersham, NSW, 9550 9931. Black Rose is 22 Enmore Rd, Newtown, NSW. Support radical libraries, dude.

Buildings should be occupied, not people.

-By Liam.

In the unrest that followed the cops killing of Alexandros Grigoropoulos (Alexis), there were many exciting and inspiring moments, critiques, thoughts and expressions produced and published by those taking part in the rebellion. An important part of this rebellion was squatting and occupations, and the revolutionary use of space.

One of the first places to be occupied was the Athens Polytechnic. This school was the scene of a brutal massacre in 1973 when students and workers protested the military dictatorship, and were attacked by the military in tanks, killing about 28 people and injuring hundreds more. The uprising is etched into the Greek collective memory with demonstrations yearly and a national day of school closures.

The group occupying the Athens Polytechnic aimed to create a space for those who were resisting in the streets to meet and shelter, and also to create what they called a "more permanent focus of resistance in the city". One of the groups concerns was that they saw the execution of Alexis as an exemplary punishment, dished out as a warning to "those who resist, those who revolt, the anarchists and anti-authoritarians", aiming at everybody's submission. If that was the aim, it backfired spectacularly.

The surrealist group of Athens published a statement in support of the protests, in which they say that "the riot's flames transformed nothing to something" in reference the bins that were used as barricades, but also applicable to the dead space at the polytechnic that recreated endlessly the cycle of social relations, that was for a few days enlivened with hopes and desires.

The General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) building was another place occupied, though this time by a group with the most awesome name ever; The General Assembly of Insurgent Workers. (awesome).

The GSEE was a typically bureaucratic Union, staffed by professional unionists and business people, and a Union steadfastly against self organisation. The GSEE had cancelled a demonstration in solidarity with rebelling youth (and a number of other issues ranging from corruption to poverty etc), and instead opted for a smaller gathering elsewhere. The other gathering was rushed and Union officials made sure members dispersed immediately afterwards; the Insurgent Workers suggest it showed the Unions fears of their members being "infected by the virus of insurrection".

The Insurgent Workers wished to create a space that was conducive to self organisation, and to smash the media perpetrated myth that the protests and rebellion were the work of nihilistic youth and that workers were separate and absent from actions.

One paragraph of the Insurgent Workers declaration reads "[we occupy the GSEE] to open up this space for the first time - as a continuation of the social opening created by the insurrection itself - a space which has been built by our contributions, a space from which we were excluded. For all these years we trusted our fate on saviours of every kind, and we end up losing our dignity. As workers we have to start assuming our responsibilities, and to stop assigning our hopes to wise leaders or "able" representatives. We have to acquire a voice of our own, to meet up, to talk, to decide, and to act Against the generalised attack we endure. The creation on collective "grassroots" resistance is the only way. (awesome).

The Thessaloniki Trade Unions Centre was the site of another occupation. The first Trade Union Center in the history of the Greek labour movement, and the building which contained a number of tame cat unions was transformed into a space

where "union members, students, migrants and comrades" could meet and organise.

The occupation was dedicated to Konstantina Kuneva; an immigrant and syndicalist in the precarious cleaning industry who was attacked in front of her home with sulphuric acid as a result of her successful workplace organising. Konstantina had been documenting the abuses she and fellow workers were subjected to, and reporting them to a number of organisations including the Trade Unions Centre; though no action was taken.

The group occupying the Thessaloniki Trade Unions Centre had similar grievances to the Insurgent Workers from Athens. In their statements they pointed out that Trade Unions Centres have been absorbed into the workings of capitalism and have a vested interest in the continuation of the system, much like many Australian Unions. They state that despite the union claiming to seek "full economic and social parity" for members, there is no mention of "subverting and negating the causes of inequality and misery". Ironically, the Trade Unions Centres were founded to "unite local workers unions", though have in their management of class conflicts

only served to disempower and fragment workers by hindering their ability for self organisation.

The actual statement is better, more interesting etc than this extremely brief summary.

Radical Journalists occupied the Union of News Editors on the 10th of January. The journalists have decided to host open discussions where reporters can speak about the difficulties encountered when reporting the insurgency that gripped Greece, and how to report tangibly and realistically without further building the spectacle surrounding the unrest.

The Journalists occupied the buildings in solidarity with a society in revolt, and in an attempt to subvert the workings of the media, which they recognise as "crucial ideology apparatus of the state", hoping to resist the reporting of the bosses views, seen as extremely important as a photographer was fired after taking a picture of a cop with a raised handgun.

Once again, as with other occupations, the journalists criticise the Union for it's tame approach to workers struggles, not showing solidarity with other workers

organisations in times of need as well as the fact that it is a top down bosses union controlling news across Greece.

All the quotes in this article are from the statements released by the various groups occupying buildings. This is not all the occupations, just some. Others included student occupations of the state auditorium in Athens, student occupations of universities in New York and I'm sure there were many others. Good summaries can be found on libcom.org

Victoria St. Forever

This unaccountably long article is about the struggle over Victoria Street in the 1970s. The street was squatted midway through that struggle, so you have to get through a fair bit of background here if that's all you're interested in. I guess you can skip ahead to the occupation, but you would miss some really great stuff about a 1970s karate champion, and, oh, some political stuff too, I guess. Your call. - Ed.

For too long, we, the people of the inner city, have stood passively by while developers were wrecking once viable communities and replacing them with a soulless wilderness of motels, office blocks, car parks and apartments for the rich.

- *Victoria Street Rag*, 1974.

Frank, you're missing it, baby, don't you understand what it's about? This struggle hasn't been for you, Frank Theeman, to sit down with me, Mick Fowler, and offer me the fucking world. You know. There's been 339 other people come into this. There's been men out of work and people arrested and beaten and handcuffed and Christ knows what. *There's been death.* There's been *kidnapping*. Don't you understand? I don't want any money.

- Mick Fowler, 1974

In the early 70s, King's Cross's grip on its working class heritage was increasingly tenuous. Long-time resident Jim Stevens said the development that would transform the area "seemed to begin with the Chevron Hotel. It mushroomed. It was what they prefer to call 'progress', but it was progress backwards." But some areas were holding out against the changes. Victoria Street, "one of the most elegant and attractive areas" of the Cross, was still full of wharfies, low-income city workers (cleaners, etc), labourers, artists and pensioners. As Ian and Teresa, who would go on to squat on the street, put it, "While the rest of the Cross fell victim to R and R and toy koalas, Victoria Street remained unchanged." But this was not to last.

A protracted building industry boom, nurtured by corrupt, pro-business state and local governments had saturated the CBD with skyscrapers. Now Victoria Street and similar inner-city areas (in the Rocks, Waterloo, etc) sang out to developers looking for the next move. The Civic Reform Association, a Liberal front running Sydney city council, was setting up incentives for developers to buy larger areas, generally by amalgamating small plots. The bigger the block of land you controlled, the higher you would be allowed to build, and thus the more value you could squeeze out of the land. (I guess this is a great deal if you are looking to build, like, a pyramid. Unfortunately, no developers were.) Meanwhile, the Askin state liberal government - corrupt on a truly epic scale - had recently abolished the protections of the Landlords and Tenants Act in 1969. Tenants had few rights and developers had strong incentives to acquire large tracts of homes. On the one hand, and in many cases, this was disastrous for residents. On the other, it created a unique possibility for struggle, as whole neighbourhoods could now unite against single owners trying to evict them.

In March, 1970 Frank Theeman's Victoria Point Pty Ltd started buying up the properties between 55 and 115 Victoria St with a view to knocking them down and throwing up some highrises. Theeman had a good look for the small-scale James Bond villain he was about to become; a short, round, hunched little man with glasses and thin hair that wasn't quite a combover yet. He had came to Australia from Vienna 30 years earlier, and somehow on the boat over convinced another of the passengers to back him in setting up a lingerie business. By the 60s, he was one of Australia's richest textile magnates, and easily recognised the tax benefits being doled out to property speculators.

His initial plan was to replace the terraces with three 45-storey towers and a carpark. Sydney City Council under the CRA rubberstamped the plan, but the State Planning Authority - not then an especially critical body - rejected it as "one of the worst cases of visual pollution" it had ever seen. A second, slightly more moderate plan - "a 20-storey tower set on a 3-storey podium with stepped development and a 6-storey carpark" - passed council in April 73.

At this point, Theeman hired a real-estate "troubleshooter", Fred Fletcher, "to get everybody out, within the week if possible". Between visits by agents and letters of termination, somewhere between 300 and 400 tenants were asked to leave within that week. Around half did so, some receiving token compensation (ranging from $20 to $200) or offers of re-housing. Resident Diane Cleymans recalled,

> A lot of the old people were given only about two days' notice. They found a lot of them rooms to move away into from here - dark, dingy old rooms. It was awful watching the old people move out.

Those who stayed faced a mixture of lies, intimidation and vandalism. Some were told the buildings were condemned, that the utilities were being disconnected, or were simply removed by force - as in the case of one 84-year-old tenant who'd lived there 40 years. The agents refused to accept rent from tenants who remained. At night, Theeman's men removed locks, kicked doors in, removed stained glass and wrought iron, and threw bricks through windows.

The residents, however, were far from helpless - some had been expecting trouble before the first evictions began. On April 8, Arthur King called a meeting outside his flat at 97a, Victoria Street. Anne Coombs later described him as "a short, nuggety man who looks like he would have made a good lightweight boxer. He is clearly someone who gives as good as he gets." As well as local residents, King invited some old friends from the famous Sydney Libertarian group, the Push. He called in on Darcy Waters and Wendy Bacon, who lived nearby, and asked if they'd be interested in coming to the residents' meeting. Waters, along with Roelof Smilde, was the de facto leader of the group, and Bacon was its newest celebrity. She'd gained notoriety as an anti-censorship campaigner and editor of the student newspaper *Tharunka* and its non-uni-based offshoot, *Thor*. The first of many times she was charged with obscenity, for publishing a bawdy bush ballad, she turned up to court wearing a nun's habit with the words, "I have been fucked by God's steel prick" written on it - a reference, she explained, to the ecstatic visions of St Theresa. Holy shit, can you imagine having the guts to do that? I think I am a little bit in love with her for that.

Although the Push were more or less on the left, they'd never been in a hurry to involve themselves in political struggles. One of their main philosophical influences from the beginning had been the eccentric Sydney Uni philosophy lecturer, John Anderson, and in a lot of ways they'd never broken away from his liberalism. As Anne Coombs says in her history of the group, "The active years of the Push coincided almost exactly with the long period of conservative government that began with the election of Robert Menzies in December 1949. The Push rejected everything that Menzies stood for - respect for authority and family values, hard work and sobriety." But this rejection wasn't so much political as a matter of lifestyle and personal taste. They disdained political organisation in favour of what they called 'open-ended' protest. They drank and gambled, fucked and argued.

About 40 people attended the meeting outside Arthur's flat and formed the Victoria Street Residents' Action Group. They planned a bigger meeting with more residents in three days time, and decided to approach the Builders Labourers' Federation for assistance. The BLF by this time had involved themselves in a number of struggles to protect working class neighbourhoods by imposing 'green bans' - that is, refusing to work on what they and local residents considered environmentally destructive projects.

For a long time, the union had been run by right-wing gangsters, but a Rank and File committee supported by the Communist Party swept the 61 elections. Although they spent a good few years rebuilding the union's crippled finances (the outgoing officials left them with £9 in the bank and £15,000 in debt), their militancy and organisational skill won a major strike for wages and conditions in 1970. This strike formed a turning point for the union and its members, who found not only their industrial strength, but pride in what they were doing. As one of them, Tommy Hogan, would later say, echoing widespread sentiments, "If I was asked prior to the 1970 strike what I did for a living, I'd probably mumble, "Oh, I'm a builder's labourer." After that, if somebody asked me what I did for a living, I was a bloody BL!"

Influenced by ideas of workers' control from the traditional labour movement, as well as the social movements of the contemporary New Left, the BLF rapidly became one of the most progressive unions in the world. The officials encouraged workers to organise themselves, refused wages beyond the industry standard, and limited their own terms in office to three years. The union was active on a wide range of progressive issues - opposing the Vietnam War, supporting campaigns for Aboriginal and prisoners' rights, and encouraging women to enter the traditionally male industry, for example. They were happy to use their significant industrial strength to support workers and activists in less powerful positions. In 1973, for example, in "a form of solidarity not greatly appreciated at Trades Hall", they supported the striking strippers of King's Cross, refusing reconstruction work on the Staccato Club until the dancers' demands were met. (Please God, somebody find me an article or thesis or something about the 1973 King's Cross strippers' strike.)

It wasn't just a matter of a supportive or progressive union machinery - the most senior officials enthusiastically involved themselves in grassroots campaigning. NSW BLF president Bob Pringle famously tried to saw down the goal posts at the SCG the night before South Africa's racially selected Springbok rugby team were due to play there, but only got through a few inches before being charged with "maliciously injuring one aluminium goal post". These were some dudes you wanted on your side if you were trying to stop your neighbourhood getting demolished. King went to see them, reporting that the residents' group was requesting a green ban, and the union quickly banned all demolition and construction work on the affected properties.

Meanwhile, the atmosphere on the street was increasingly heavy, as Theeman had hired one Joe Meissner as his head of security for the street. Meissner liked to "inquire when you intended moving out, while standing in the doorway with a crowbar or wrench in his hand." He was a karate champion, and really, isn't this like the most evocative description in Australian history - thuggish 1970s karate champ? You hear that and you know exactly what he looked like. He had no front teeth, which he said was the result of a confrontation with a BL on Victoria Street, but which squatters would insist came about through his teenage party trick of biting steel bars. His karate champion status was similarly questionable. He

claimed to have won the Australian Karate title from 68 to 71, but had spent at least two of those years in jail for stealing submachine guns from an army base. In 71, he actually did win a World Karate title in a Japanese tournament, but would later boast that he did so by kicking three of his four opponents in the nuts. Afterwards, unsurprisingly, the audience pelted him with garbage. If the whole thing is not Cobra Kai enough for you, check out this choice Meissner quote: "I saturate my ego with sadism. I become bent on swift and callous destruction of the opposition, with total disregard for accepted ethics and loyalty." I kind of love this dude even more than Wendy Bacon.

Theeman had contacts beyond the world of shady karate bouncers, though. On the morning of April 11, with the Action Group's second meeting scheduled for that night, two uniformed police arrived at King's house. They asked his name and told him he would have to come to Darlinghurst Police Station because they had a warrant for unpaid maintenance. This struck him as strange, because he'd never been married. At the station, the police left him in the car and went inside. When they came back, they told him that the warrants had actually been issued in the 50s, when he was about 15, and so they drove him home. This was the first sign that Theeman had cops in his pocket, but far from the last.

On April 11, the Victoria Street Action Group held its second meeting at the Wayside Chapel, around the corner from Victoria Street. Over a hundred people turned up - mostly residents, but also a few members of the Push and some BLF representatives. Buoyed by the union's support, the meeting decided to start overnight street patrols to prevent vandalism and intimidation by Meissner and his thugs. As John Birmingham describes Meissner's 'agents', "These were 70s goons, of course, so they tended to turn out in hipster flares, Addidas sneakers, nylon Gloweave shirts and long, greasy hair. But what they lacked in sartorial impact they made up for by toting pick handles everywhere." It must have taken remarkable courage for the residents to patrol those streets after dark. Certainly, those involved found it terrifying and draining - Susan Varga would note in an interview decades later that she still didn't like to go to Victoria Street.

The next night, the cops came again for Arthur King. This time the officers, from the Consorting Squad, claimed to have been tipped off that there were drugs in his

house. They didn't conduct a search, and left. King went to see Fred Fletcher, Theeman's "troubleshooter", to tell him to cut it out with the police harrassment. Fletcher asked if he had life insurance. King laughed a you-don't-scare-me laugh, and Fletcher walked away.

That Friday, the 13th (uh oh), King had a few friends over for drinks. They left at 11 to join the street patrol, and he went to bed. Around 4:30 the next morning he was woken up when a man in his bedroom turned on the light. King jumped out of bed and chased the guy out of the room, only to be jumped by two more guys waiting in the hall. He was told to dress, blindfolded, and dragged into the street with a rope tied around his neck. When he started yelling for help, one of the men put a knife to his neck and told him, "This is a knife. If you make a wrong move you'll drown in your own blood." One of his neighbours, Gregory Bible, later reported hearing a man screaming and seeing him forced into a car. Thanks for your help, Mr Bible!

King was expecting visitors that morning, and when he didn't answer the door they eventually forced their way in. They knew something was up; his car was outside, he didn't seem to have packed any clothes and all his shoes were still there. They started ringing round friends and people he might have visited, and at midday Wendy Bacon and Susan Varga, a friend of King's, went to Darlinghurst Police Station, suspecting further harrassment. The cops told them he wasn't there, but to check at other stations. That evening, they went back to report him missing. The next morning, news reports led with the disappearance. Jack Mundey noted that this was "the sort of thing that's going to happen if we keep confronting capital." He added, with unfortunate prescience, "I wouldn't be surprised to see actual death in the struggle to see which way the inner city goes." Thugs drove up and down the street, yelling, "We're going to get you and you'll be gone."

Following his abduction, King was shoved into the boot of a car and driven to a hotel room that he believed was on the south coast. On Monday, one of his kidnappers told him they were going to release him, and he wouldn't be harmed as long as he never told anyone what happened - he should make up a story about a migraine. They loaded him back in the boot and drove him round some more. At one point, he noticed through a hole in the boot that they were parked outside the

Venus Room, a club run by the famous gangster Abe Saffron. They dropped him off outside St Vincent's Hospital, and when he went inside, he saw a man watching him who he later identified as Jim Anderson, a lackey of Saffron's.

When he got back to his place on Victoria Street, King did exactly what I would have done - packed his shit and left. He told his best friend, Andre Frankovitz, another Push figure, what had happened, but swore him to secrecy, not knowing who he could trust and fearing the Action Group may have been infiltrated. He told the cops he'd hitchhiked away on a spontaneous fishing trip. Frankovits recalled, "He came back and he was freaked out. I was there and I helped him get away from the rest of them. He was absolutely terrified, and quite rightly." Later, King would sum up the campaign with the brutal realism of a man kidnapped for what he believed in - "To bring back low-cost housing to one of the best streets in Sydney? Shit, it had no chance of success."

The events permanently destroyed Frankovits's friendship with the rest of the Push. Nobody was sure what had happened, and some suspected King had faked his own kidnapping to discredit the campaign. Frankovitz was annoyed at being in the middle, and his overriding concern was his friend's safety. "The people concerned put the worst possible construction on that… Because I was around and he wasn't, I was interrogated. I was harrassed in the most acusatory way." Bacon, for her part, recalls that

> Andre was incredibly hostile. I've never felt right about Andre since. He'd been a really close friend of mine but since then I've found him detached, cynical, supercilious, thinking that we thought things that I don't think that we ever did think.

After King disappeared, most of the remaining residents moved out, but Mick Fowler moved back in. A seamen with an awesome moustache and a gregarious, laidback manner, Fowler came back from sea to find he'd been evicted. On his own account (which probably takes some liberties with the facts), he came home to find his mother sitting on the front step, surrounded by their belongings, holding a $50 note she'd been given to relocate. Really, she was probably gone when he

came back, but he was certainly unimpressed to find he'd been evicted. With a few friends, Fowler confronted Meissner and some cops out front of his flat. "Look, I'm Mick Fowler," he told them. "I'm the legal tenant, I live here. My gear's been put out, the joint's been broken into, I'm very upset. I've come 2,000 fucking miles to find this and you're pushing me aside." An unimpressed Meissner replied, "I represent the owner and I want him arrested." The cops happily complied.

That was April 30. On May 3 he made a second attempt to enter his home, this time accompanied by about 50 BLs and members of the Seamen's Union. The group easily gained access to the building and turfed out three security guards, including Meissner, promising to stop them if they tried to get back in. Fowler, a likeable guy who was plainly not going to be intimidated by karate-school thugs or anyone else, seems to have had a galvanising effect on the remaining residents and their allies. For over a month, the dozen-odd residents persisted despite the presence of Meissner's thugs and a wave of suspicious fires and other vandalism.

Meanwhile, on May 2, the National Trust had officially classified the street for reasons including its beauty and historical associations with major writers and artists - Trust Director RN Walker had said, "It could be described as the Montmartre of Sydney." Theeman was outraged at the idea the Trust would classify an entire street, something it had never done before. The classification strengthened the BLF's, and hence the residents', position. The union had evolved a symbiotic relationship with the Trust, which at that point had no actual power of its own, but came to wield significant influence with green bans at the ready to back its decisions.

A desperate Theeman, who was losing thousands of dollars a day, hired Ken Woolley, an architect with the Trust's Historic Buildings Commission, to come up with a new plan that would meet with Trust approval. Theeman attended a meeting with residents and BLF representatives, where he said he would be willing to consider turning the area into low-cost homes, and promised to end all evictions and harrassment until Woolley's plan was ready. He broke the latter promise even quicker than the former, but on the 4th of June, the Trust endorsed Woolley's plan. Low-rise buildings would be built on sites without heritage value; historic housing facades would be retained. Theeman reiterated his facile pledge to "provide as

much low-cost accomodation as is humanly possible with my new scheme." Meanwhile, 'accidents' remained common in the empty houses of Victoria St; overnight, houses flooded, and mattresses were set alight.

As Bob Pringle put it, the Trust's decision

> left the union in an invidious position where up to that stage, we'd always supported the National Trust. But on this occasion we had the situation where the buildings were being preserved, but for who? The other outstanding issue was the rights of low-income earners - traditionally all of these areas had housed low-income earners - and they were being thrown out to be replaced by trendies and so on.

Without Trust support, prospects for saving the street were shrinking, especially as the thugs rendered more houses uninhabitable night by night. On June 10, a small group of squatters moved into two of the empty houses. On Theeman's account, they called him the following morning:

> "Frank Theeman? We have now occupied number 57 and 59."
> I said, "What? What do you mean?"
> "The building was empty, we have occupied it to prevent it deteriorating any further. We have taken possession of it."
> I said, "Look, you're trespassing, get out of there. Don't be foolish." Anyway, they didn't.

Many of the early squatters were associated with the Push, but as the struggle continued, they attracted a wider range of supporters and occupants. Elvis Kipman was an ABC employee with a long-time aversion to political activity who jogged by every day until he was curious enough to ask what was going on, and soon moved in. He would later say that, "I've felt alienated all my adult life and for the first time here I began to feel closer to people." A woman named Ruth moved in

somewhat reluctantly with her partner and their son. At first, she said, "I found myself becoming quite aggressive and intolerant and very confused." But as she got to know those around her, "a communal spirit was well and truly established and nothing, not even the harrassment from the agents and police, was going to destroy it." By the end of the year there were over a hundred squatters on the street, including some former tenants. All paid rent - a quarter of their income up to a maximum of $10 a week - into a Theeman company account. Theeman didn't think this at all funny.

Although Theeman was the owner of the squatted homes, it was unclear what the legal status of the occupants was. Theeman had one squatter, John Cox (Ruth's partner), charged with trespass as a test case. He was eventually convicted, but appealed. The case provided an ironic kind of tenure for the squatters, who felt safe from eviction pending the outcome of the trial - as Cox put it, "A summons is as good as a 5a lease." Nevertheless, the squatters faced continuing abuse from Meissner's karate goons. A group of men arrived at Cox's house one evening, demanding to speak to some people none of the residents had ever heard of. When the squatters told them they weren't there, the visitors became abusive and threatened to smash the door down and beat up everybody inside. The residents responded by throwing a bag of lime over their heads from an upstairs window, and Cox, wielding a chair leg, chased them off. Police harrassment also continued - at one stage, for example, the vice squad broke down the door to Bacon's squat in the middle of the night.

The earliest squatters probably didn't expect to last long - hell, you have to be impressed that they'd even consider squatting a street patrolled by gangs of thugs, especially after a leading campaigner was kidnapped and terrorised. One described the atmosphere:

> We'd say, 'Ah, look, will we do this, will we do that?' We'd think, 'Oh, we mightn't be here next week.' And if we took that attitude, nothing ever happened. We started to develop the idea that we'd be here forever, so we'd plant trees, reconstruct the place. Pulling down the fences was one of the most important physical things we

> ever did in that community. The impact was really dramatic. You've got to experience it, really, it was really marvellous.

Another agreed:

> There was a lot of feeling there. For me, it was euphoric. We actually got to the point of really believing it was ours, that we'd been here forever and that we would be here forever, and that they wouldn't evict us.

Bacon described the squatting as

> really exciting for everyone who was there. There'd always be something happening, like the plumbing would get cut off, or one of the thugs would come and smash up the wiring, or we would have broken into another house.

A squatter named Chris wrote that

> every Wednesday night we got together in the Stables [the squatters' de facto headquarters] to discuss new ideas, problems, criticisms and general feelings. We called it a weekly meeting. Other nights we'd do much the same thing and call it a party.

I'm not sure if this reflects a festive attitude to organisation or a depressingly bureaucratic approach to partying, but I think he meant the former. The Push members' ideas about consensus certainly influenced the meeting style; at their insistence, there was no chair and no voting. While some squatters undoubtedly found this liberating, others must have struggled to make themselves heard. As Mundey said, "What consensus meant was that the ones who could talk the loudest and the longest and the best held sway, and that's what the Libertarians did." But he was also impressed with the Push's direct-action spirit, and the individuals

involved. "It was Wendy [Bacon] and Liz [Fell's] way of fighting that won the respect of the union," he said.

For some, according to Push historian Anne Coombs, "the cooperation between the BLF and a section of the Push over Victoria Street was a sign of a long-awaited rapprochement between libertarianism and communism". For others, such a rapprochement was neither long-awaited nor welcome. Frank Moorhouse, derisive of the whole struggle, dismissed it as "a romantic alliance engineered by the women who were seeking fresh sexual field to explore." Bacon's reply was simple and angry: "There wasn't much fucking going on; there wasn't much time!" Nevertheless, relationships between members of the BLF and the women of the Push soon emerged around the squats - Bacon and Mundey, Fell and Owens, and others. I mean, I hate to gossip, but all this is kind of awesome to me. These people who in a lot of ways seem so legendary were so much like us - the same half-annoying, half-awesome meetings, the same feelings of collective achievement, the same blurring of the social and the political, the same complexly incestuous sex lives. It's just how things are meant to be.

The squats also attracted a significant number of parents. Theeman's thugs were especially vicious in trying to intimidate the single mothers, threatening to call Child Welfare and have the kids taken away. At one point, the squatters did contact Child Welfare to see if this threat had any teeth, and were told that as far as the department was concerned, they were ordinary family groups. While the precarious circumstances and intimidation frightened away many families, enough stayed for the squatters to organise their own daycare service. Parents contributed $2 a week towards equipment and outings, and various squatters - not only parents - volunteered a day or two a week to look after the kids. The back of 115 Victoria St became the squatters' creche, including a downstairs flat, three old garages and grass and concrete back yards. They built swings, a cubby house, and a sandpit, and amassed "books, jigsaws, dolls, cars, paints and brushes, blackboards and chalk, construction toys, building materials, paste, plasticene, and old clothes for dressing up." One mother spoke in glowing terms of the way the squatters took collective responsibility for the children on the street:

> Children looked after children knowing there was loving support from the nearest adult, *any* adult, who would give him or herself to the child and not just "find Mummy" and pass the buck back to the woman… Just about everyone was together enough to take on the kids en masse or otherwise, and what was even nicer was that the *men* were in it too.

In September, the first real tragedy of Victoria St occurred. At 5:30am on Thursday the 6th, firemen arrived to find number 103 in flames. They met an Aboriginal man who'd jumped out a window to escape the blaze, and he told them that his sister was still inside. She was later found, dead. The previous evening the siblings had met a white guy who they'd invited to come stay, and who had since disappeared - presumably the arsonist. If you're wondering exactly how racist Australia is, note that while an inquest and extended sections of several books have discussed the later Victoria St-related murder of anglo heiress Juanita Nielsen, I can't even find the name of the woman who died in this fire. Most books that discuss the struggle for the street mention it in passing, like, "and a young Indigenous woman died in a fire". My research skills are nothing to boast about, but I couldn't even find a mention of the fire in contemporary Sydney newspapers. The incident was not considered by the Nielsen inquest (which delved into other examples of Victoria Street violence, such as the Arthur King kidnapping). I assume, pretty confidently, that no-one was ever charged with the arson. I don't know, it seems so impossible that a woman could *burn to death*, and nobody involved in the campaign would ever make mention of it again, this big controversial struggle and it's not even a news story? I kind of wonder if the story is apocryphal, or was Theeman connected enough to cover it up? I don't know. Rest in peace, whoever you were.

In October, the BLF held its triennial election. By this point, the bosses and state government understood their best chance against the green bans was the ticket led by Federal Secretary Norm Gallagher. Gallagher, a Maoist, was hostile to the BLF's leadership - partly because they were associated with the Communist Party (neither Maoist nor Stalinist), partly because their anti-bureaucratic, anti-hierarchical policies challenged the union status quo, and partly - according to

several sources - because he was shitted off that Jack Mundey was more famous and popular than he was. Gallagher had promised to 'review' all green bans if the Maoists won, and ran full page "To all building workers: A message of concern" ads in major newspapers, criticising the state leadership. Gallagher was a pig, the worst kind of class traitor. His team was soundly defeated in the elections, but this merely signalled a change in strategy for the bosses and the union's federal leadership.

On the 16th, scab labour moved in to commence demolition in a green banned area of the Rocks. Union official Tom Hogan recalls, "I picked up a megaphone and said... 'We'll show you. We'll stop the city.' But I was too late, it had stopped of its own accord. There wasn't one job left working when I walked through it to Town Hall." 4,000 workers had walked off the job to occupy the site in the Rocks, refusing to leave until work was halted. The following Monday, a group of BLs and resident activists occupied the site in protest, including about 20 Victoria St squatters. One of them, Elvis Kipman, climbed a tree and sat on a 15-metre-high branch for 14 hours. I guess the dude liked climbing things, because it wouldn't be the last time.

The MBA launched an extended lockout of all BLs, which ended up lasting three weeks and failing to force the union to back down - Owens described it as the Master Builders' Association's "most unsuccessful expensive experiment". But the lockout had strained the union membership, and furthered their political isolation. The *Manufacturers' Monthly* reported

> The Jack Mundey led builders labourers in NSW are slowly being encircled, with the noose getting tighter. With the MBA prepared to shut down 'indefinitely', other unions have moved against the BLF with at least tacit support from the ACTU.

At the start of December, John Cox's appeal against his conviction for trespassing was dismissed. Squatting on Victoria St was officially illegal; barricading began immediately. Some of the residents moved out, with those who remained taking their valuables elsewhere. They set up a phone tree and warning sirens, and

reorganised street patrols to activate them. But as the weeks wore on, and rumours that eviction was imminent came and went, people started to relax again, some believing they would be allowed to stay.

On December 29, one of Meissner's thugs approached an Action Group member, telling them that Meissner had recruited additional staff for the evictions, and that police would block either end of the street while the thugs broke in and evicted the residents. Presumably intended to intimidate the squatters, the warning instead inspired a fresh bout of barricading. But three days later a cop told his brother, a BL, that hundreds of police were being sent to Victoria St first thing in the morning. As word reached the Action Group, 30 supporters rushed to join the 50 squatters still living on the street.

At 6:20am on January 3, nearby residents come to warn the squatters that hundreds of cops and some paddy wagons were lined up outside Darlinghurst Police Station. The squatters rushed through some last-minute barricading and fired up the phone tree. Soon, the police arrived at either end of the street, accompanied by Meissner's thugs - now described as 'controllers' in a Theeman press release. As Ian and Teresa described them, "The controllers' appearance was large and very beery. They sported sledgehammers, axes and crow-bars. They shook hands with the police and both groups moved towards the houses."

The controllers made their first moves against number 57, but the description of the men as "very beery" seems to have been apt, as they spent five minutes trying to crowbar open an unlocked gate. As the controllers forced their way into the house, one squatter climbed over into the more securely barricaded number 59. Inside, controllers ignored the squatters and set about rendering the house uninhabitable - smashing fittings, destroying plumbing and wiring, ripping doors off their hinges. Police followed to arrest those squatters who refused to leave.

Squatter Val Hodgson said that as the siege began, she felt secure and comfortable among friends,

> but it was just the banging and the thumping and knowing of the imminent destruction and seeing the

> ceiling fall down and the lightbulbs flicker… and they tipped caustic soda on Eric… it was really quite terrifying. They were menacing, through the holes they made in the window, snarling and snapping and saying, "We're going to get you." It was so frightening I was pleased when the police rushed in to prevent them doing us any damage.

Asked later about these aggressive methods, Theeman would sneer, "I didn't think to call in the Salvation Army to get these people out would be the right thing."

Squatters had barricaded themselves into just 13 of the houses on the street (Jesus Christ guys, way to pick a lucky number!), but the controllers managed to draw out the eviction process by forcing their way into six empty buildings Theeman had barricaded *against* squatters. Nevertheless, by 8:30 almost all squatters had been removed and 26 of them were in jail, along with 13 supporters, mostly charged with obstruction. Only two squatters remained, Keith Mullins and Con Papadatos, both perched on the chimney at number 115. The police prevented the controllers smashing the chimney out from under them, and both men were still there when the arrestees returned to the street at 5:30 in the afternoon. By then, hundreds of supporters lined the street, facing 100 cops and 30 controllers. Theeman had chosen early January as a time when BLs traditionally took their holidays, but many had still arrived on the street to lend support, and some, including BLF Secretary Joe Owens, were among those arrested.

"At nightfall," as Ian and Teresa recall,

> the police trained a spotlight on the demonstrators. This effectively prevented them from watching Keith and Con, but it provided the two men with an excellent view of their supporters, who then staged an impromptu concert. The crowd sang appropriate numbers such as 'Chim Chiminee' and improvised new verses for old songs.

The two men came down early the next morning, but Kipman climbed up onto the neigbouring chimney at 114 at dawn. Those noted rocket scientists, the controllers, lit a fire below to force him down. Kipman simply wedged his pillows and blankets into the chimney and smoked them out of the house. Police eventually climbed onto the roof, handcuffed Kipman, and demolished the chimney around him. He was the last squatter to be removed from Victoria St, and the occupation, after six months, had come to an end.

Both the Action Group and the green ban on Victoria St continued despite the evictions. Many of the squatters remained involved in the Action Group, along with the two remaining, legal Victoria Street tenants (one being Mick Fowler, the other I'm not sure of). Their focus shifted towards defending the BLF, which faced continued attacks from the Master Builders' Association and its own Federal branch.

The Action Group published a number of newspapers, including *The City Squatter* and *The Victoria Street Rag*. The latter featured weather reports: "Forecast: There might be trouble but there will be no demolition," and, "Forecast: Victoria Street will be saved. Low-cost cooperative housing will triumph." Squatters visiting the street and their old neighbours found themselves scuffling with the controllers, and at least one, Kipman, was badly beaten. Bill Donnely, Theeman's PR manager, boasted that the controllers would use "whatever force possible" to prevent squatters re-entering their homes.

Protests continued, with a number of rallies both specifically defending Victoria St and for residents' rights and green bans in general. At one point, the Action Group managed to infiltrate a party at Theeman's luxurious Bellevue Hill home. Among others, the notoriously corrupt and pro-developer premier Robert Askin was in attendance. A group of activists dressed as high-society types distributed business cards to guests, with messages such as, "Under concrete and glass Sydney's disappearing fast," and, "The person next to you may be a demonstrator." Theeman eventually agreed "he will not demolish, he will withdraw the thugs from the Street, and no development will take place until it has been endorsed by the residents".

But in June 1974, the Master Builders' Assocation finally succeeded in its long campaign to have the NSW BLF deregistered. Gallagher swooped, launching a largely illegal intervention, safe in the knowledge that the NSW BLF would be unwilling to take legal action against fellow unionists. Gallagher reached a deal with the MBA where bosses would give preference to federal, rather than state, BLF members. He brought in workers from interstate to take jobs from sacked NSW workers. In March 1975, the NSW BLF's office was broken into, and its membership files stolen. The only possible motive lay with Gallagher and his allies, but the police brought no charges. Despite persistent rank-and-file support, the NSW BLF had no choice but to advise members to change from state to federal tickets. At the end of their final stopwork meeting, at which the leadership stood down, Mundey, Owens and Pringle received a tearful, 10-minute standing ovation from 2,000 loyal BLs. As Owens would later note, they'd had no chance against the Federal intervention: "It's a tribute to our rank-and-file that it took them six months."

A few weeks later, the first green ban was lifted - the one on Victoria St, which Gallagher dismissed as "little more than a brothel". The same day, Theeman drove him down the street, and Gallagher - who would publicly boast of his environmental credentials - simply noted that he should have torn the fucking lot down.

Mick Fowler, the last legal tenant, was evicted on the 5th of May. A section of that year's May Day march diverted to Victoria Street for a wake, where they buried a coffin containing "the rights of the low income earners" in Fowler's front yard. When Fowler died four years later, in Perth, hundreds turned out for a traditional street funeral in Victoria St. A plaque to Fowler remains at the top of the sandstone steps down to Woolloomooloo.

The last significant event, and great tragedy, of the campaign came on the 4th of July, when Juanita Nielsen disappeared, never to be seen again. She was the bohemian daughter of department store millionaire Mark Foys, and at the time the squats emerged, she was living on Victoria St (in a house outside the area Theeman wanted to acquire), publishing a local paper called *NOW*, which consisted mostly of ads for local businesses. She came to the earliest residents'

meetings and committed to covering the struggle in her paper, but was openly critical of the movement's direction - she disapproved of communists and other radicals, and feared the effects of squatting and green bans on local property values. But the campaign radicalised her, and her writing became more militant. "Laws are based around property, not people," she editorialised. "Green bans made people more important." Following the end of the squats, the green ban, and Mick Fowler's tenancy, she was the most prominent critic of the Victoria St development.

Mundey described her as having "a striking appearance. She wore broad-brimmed, nineteen-twentyish hats, dark, expensive dresses and high-gloss, high-heeled shoes." According to her business partner, David Farrell, she had many pairs of false eyelashes, and "there was a lot of work in putting these on each morning, and getting the glue above was a trauma each day." Her hair, he said, was her trademark.

> When she had the time, the hair would be pinned up and she would wear one of several wigs over the top of her hair. She would not, if she had time, go out without a wig on. The wig was curled up in a fairly high hairstyle, and her hair would be under that. It's been described as a beehive style.

She was a well-known, easily recognisable figure around the Cross.

In June, Nielsen received threats serious enough that she began keeping Farrell informed of her day-to-day movements. She also mentioned the threats to her partner, John Glebe, the General Secretary of the Water and Sewerage Employees' Union - one of the last unions still upholding bans on Victoria St work. For some time, Glebe said, she had been carrying cassette tapes in her bag that she described as containing "highly volatile information" that could "blow the top off" what she was working on. Lloyd Marshall, who would eventually be charged with conspiracy to kidnap Nielsen, also reported that he believed she

> had something in her possession, something they wanted. I gained the impression it was a document that she always carried and that it could be used against people whom Eddie [Trigg] and Shayne [Martin-Simmonds] and I were involved with… The impression I got was that the document linked Abe Saffron with Victoria Street.

Saffron was a well-known gangster who ran a number of shady businesses in the Cross. He was, in fact, involved with Victoria Street, via a serious of fronts and shell companies. The Parkes Development Company lodged a DA on 203-211 and 204-220 Victoria St; some of these properties had been purchased by a Matana Pty Ltd, which gave its address as 119 Kippax St, but later changed this to "c/o Abe Saffron". 119-139 Victoria Street also belonged jointly to Spatial Holdings and Bafsim Number 17 Pty Ltd, with Spatial Holdings having the same Kippax St address once used by Matana. Saffron, via his deputy, Jim Anderson was almost certainly Theeman's point man in arranging police and other harrassment of Victoria St residents, including the kidnapping of Arthur King.

In 1977, three men - Edward Trigg, Lloyd Marshall, and Shayne Martin-Simmonds - were charged with conspiracy to kidnap Juanita Nielsen. At their first trial, the judge directed the jury to acquit Marshall for lack of evidence, and the jury were unable to reach a verdict on the other two men. While Martin-Simmonds was sentenced to two years at a second trial, Trigg absconded on bail. He was arrested by San Francisco police in 1982. He complained to the SF cops that, without a body, there was no proof of a murder.

> They are making all this noise over a woman who was nothing but an out-and-out communist, no loss to society at all… If I go back there I am going to have to name names. I have got people back there in power who will take care of me.

Trigg was returned to Long Bay Jail to await trial. He unsuccessfully attempted to serve subpoenas on Saffron, Anderson and Theeman for his trial, but presumably

these were meant as a warning that he was willing to talk if they failed to take care of him. In the Metropolitan Remand Centre, Trigg met a 25-year-old law student who would later claim Trigg had told him that someone, probably Saffron, had placed $70,000 in a trust for him. Trigg pled guilty and was sentenced to three years, of which he expected to serve about 18 months. According to the student, Trigg felt he'd outsmarted Saffron, who would never have paid so much if he'd realised the sentence would be so short.

In 1978, journalist Tony Reeves conducted his own research into the case, and concluded that disgraced former police officer Fred Krahe had accepted the contract to kill Nielsen and either committed or arranged her murder. Krahe, described by one detective as "a big, brooding bastard with an aura of power and evil about him," was a known associate of both Saffron and Theeman. Krahe had been implicated in a wide range of extortion rackets, as well as organising bank robberies, and having arranged the murder of fellow corrupt cop, Superintendent Don Fergusson. Reeves also claimed that the police had suppressed information about Nielsen's movements on the day of her disappearance, and released a misleading photo and description.

At the end of a 1983 inquest into her disappearance, the jury took just 55 minutes to conclude that Nielsen was dead, but that they were unable to determine how, or when. They added, somewhat diplomatically, "There is evidence to show that the police inquiries were inhibited by an atmosphere of corruption, real or imagined, that existed at the time."

I don't think there's any doubt that Nielsen was murdered by men acting for Jim Anderson, at the behest of Abe Saffron, and with at least the tacit approval of Frank Theeman. Beyond that, it's impossible to say for sure what happened. Did she possess documents that somehow incriminated one or all of them? Or was it simply that, as publisher of *NOW* and girlfriend of a senior official in the last union still obstructing development, she was the only remaining obstacle to Theeman and Saffron's plans for Victoria St? These questions are now unlikely to be answered.

When I started working on this article, I thought it would be some kind of cool local equivalent to *On The Waterfront* or *Scarface*; an exciting, glamorous clash between gangsters and communists, the most action-packed episode in Australian activism. In the end, it was in many ways a painfully depressing account of a terrible loss for popular forces - a neighbourhood crushed, friendships destroyed, and two women murdered. Moreover, as the Burgmanns put it, "Because the ban was broken at a crucial stage, the ultimate beneficiaries of the attractive streetscape saved by the ban were the 'yuppies', the middle-class gentrifiers of the city." All that for this.

Still, I think there is reason for optimism in the history of this struggle - above all, in the heroic bravery shown by all those who took part. I remember the emergency meeting outside the squatted balloon shop in King St after the owner had threatened to return with some thugs, and I was vocal in insisting we should leave for everybody's safety. (We did, but eventually negotiated a sort-of settlement that gave us time for a couple more events and to move out.) I still think this was the right call, and would never suggest that anyone should risk injury over something as ultimately trivial as a squatted house. But it's good to know that you can, and people have - right here, in living memory. Men and woman who would not be intimidated by the overt presence of violent goons could move into empties belonging to outright gangsters, and with the support of organised labour and local residents, transform those houses for the better. For six months, under the most trying circumstances, they lived communally, tore down fences and put in vegie patches, organised campaigns and parties, resisted what Bacon called "legal and illegal violence" and looked after each others' kids.

And certainly, the squatters knew their history. They looked back fondly, perhaps nostalgically, on Depression-era anti-eviction activity, and drew parallels between Meissner's thugs and the fascist New Guard. They took inspiration from squats like Maranmah, occupied and organised communally by returned servicemen and their families after WWII. I like to think that by remembering their struggle, we follow their example in a small way.

Sources

If you're interested in more of this story, there are three books I'd recommend - Meredith and Verity Burgmann's excellent history of the BLF, *Green Bans, Red Union*, and Anne Coombs's Push history, *Sexy and Anarchy*, both of which discuss Victoria St at some length, and David Hickie's *The Prince and the Premier*, about corruption and organised crime in NSW in the 70s, including a lengthy account of the Juanita Nielsen inquest. I also looked at John Birmingham's *Leviathan* and Jack Mundey's autobiography. Iain McIntyre very helpfully sent me a copy of the squatters' own newspaper, *The City Squatter*. The other main sources were the documentaries *Rocking the Foundations*, about the BLF, and *Woolloomoloo: Redevelopment 1969-1971*.

Reviews (Actually, just review, I guess.)

The House that was Eureka, Nadia Wheatley.
Review by Princess Mob.

When Evie's family moves from the suburbs to Liberty Street, Newtown, she has to deal with more than her bratty little sisters, grumpy stepfather, and Noel, the geeky, mouth-organ playing boy next door. Her pokey terrace house is haunted by events of the past: the violent battle between police and anti-eviction picketers that happened in 1931. Evie and Noel echo – and begin to blend into – another pair of teenagers who lived in their houses: Nobby, class-traitor son of the landlord and Lizzie, fiery admirer of Alexandra Kollantai.

The house that was Eureka is a Young Adult novel about anti-eviction struggles and the Unemployed Workers' Movement in Sydney during the Great Depression. It's firmly based in historical research: Wheatley's bio at the back says she was the first historian to document these events. I don't know if that's true or not, but she certainly tells the story well, with attention to social and domestic details well beyond the clash of battle.

The book emphasises how successful the anti-eviction movement was: until a series of violent police attacks, the movement managed to stop eviction at every one of over 200 houses they picketed, and the police violence at Liberty Street caused such a backlash that laws were changed to give tenants more protection.

The other point the novel makes is that history can be dangerous: that 'if today's unemployed know that other unemployed workers

fought for their rights in the past, it might make it easier for them to resist.'

Unemployment is an issue in the modern part of the novel as well: anyone who as had to interact with Centerlink will recognise the low-grade drama of Evie's dealings with unemployment bureaucracy. (As well as being a history student, Wheatley was involved in the considerably less dramatic Unemployed Workers Movement of the 1980s.)

The role that past struggle can play today is illustrated at the novels' climax in an amusingly literal but very satisfying fashion.

The novel is interspersed with radical songs and poems from the 1930s and is probably one of the few Australian books for children to open with a quote from Marx.

For the inner-Sydney reader, there's the fun of trying to recognise landmarks from two eras of Newtown. (Black Rose Books even makes a brief disguised cameo).

I meant to review a bunch of stuff for this issue but ended up writing that 400 page Victoria St article instead. However, Renovation Nation is a really good cultural/economic history of the 90s housing boom & its aftermath. I'll try & review it properly next time, but its worth checking out in the meantime. - Ed.

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University acts on squatters

Housing protest ended by police eviction

by CORINNE PODGER and BEDE CARMODY

SQUATTERS occupying vacant houses owned by Sydney University were evicted on Monday, a week after they moved in to protest at a lack of housing.

More than 30 students and homeless people occupied the four Forest Lodge houses in Catherine and Arundel Sts, which had been lying empty for more than three years.

They were cleared of tenants in 1990 and boarded up, and have since been extensively damaged by vandals.

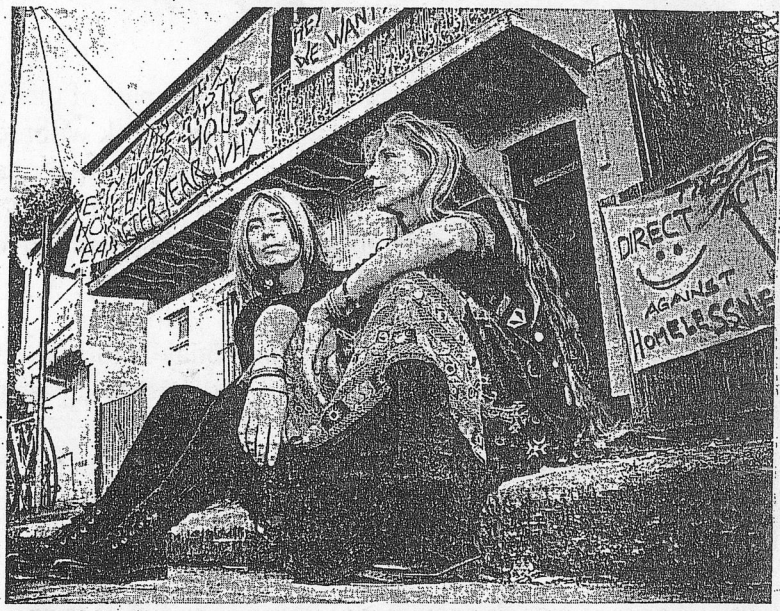
The squatters had offered to pay rent but this was refused by the university and an eviction notice was served on them on Friday.

On Monday 32 police officers from the inner west district evicted the squatters.

Glebe Patrol Commander Inspector Bob Rolfe, in charge of the operation, said the squatters left "quite peacefully" and there were no arrests.

Instead of moving quietly into the properties, as is standard squatter practice, the squatters made no secret of their action deciding to make "a more public action".

"We want [the university] to be made publicly accountable for their use of housing as a resource, and to use some of these properties before they buy anymore," a squatter named Nat said.



Suzanne (left) and Nat: squatting in a protest directed at Sydney University PHOTO Paul Melville

"The houses have been in a total state of disrepair, so we are moving in to clean them up and make them suitable to live in."

Nat said university-owned houses in Rose St, Darlington, had also been emptied of squatters in 1990, and been demolished or left in a state of neglect.

The squatters negotiated with the university to pay rent on these houses and say they did so for more than a year before being evicted.

University Common Services manager Peter Dodd confirmed the Rose St site had remained undeveloped.

"Our resources are not infinite and we can't move as fast as we would like, so [the houses] do lay vacant for some time until we can use them," he said.

Mr Dodd denied students' claims that the university kept "many" houses empty during the current housing shortage.

"The university owns just 10 empty houses within a two kilometre radius of the campus, so I don't think we are contributing to the housing shortage in a significant way," he said.

"And all 10 houses are targeted for student housing or office development as the resources become available."

An application to subdivide and sell the Catherine St site was approved by Leichhardt Council in May, and Mr Dodd said the houses would be placed on the market "within a couple of months of their vacation".

one of many media coverages